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Examining Influencing Factors on BSW Students' Intent to Persist

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Examining Influencing Factors on BSW Students' Intent to Persist

by

Teresa L. Beadlescomb

A Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Social Work

St. Catherine University | University of St. Thomas
School of Social Work

May 2018

Abstract

Students of color remain underrepresented in social work education programs. According to the Council on Social Work Education (2016), only 37.4% of the 19,596 BSW degrees awarded during the 2014-2015 academic year, were awarded to students from historically underrepresented groups (CSWE, 2016). The first product of this banded dissertation presents a conceptual framework, through the lens of empowerment theory, for understanding the varied and nuanced influencing factors contributing to BSW students' intent to persist. This paper explored ways in which social work programs are and are not providing opportunities for students to demonstrate that they are motivated and competent learners to the degree that they intend to persist in their social work education endeavors.

The second product of this banded dissertation is an empirical paper that seeks to expand the understanding of how BSW students from different racial/ethnic groupings differ in terms of their intent to persist through completion of their degrees. Additionally, the study explores ways in which student views concerning the presence of certain domains of implicit curriculum differed between ethnic groups. This study responds to the lack of such research by conducting a cross-sectional survey of 247 BSW students at a mid-size Midwestern university in the United States. T-tests were used to explore whether the intent to persist differed by ethnic group. With the exception of the frequency with which students across racial groups interacted with social work faculty outside of the classroom, responses through independent-samples-t-tests were similar across ethnic groups. Ninety-seven percent of students across all ethnic groups surveyed reported an intent to persist through the completion of their degree. Additionally, students from all ethnic groups reported positive implicit curriculum experiences through their participation in this social work education program. Regarding student/faculty interaction, Caucasian students reported

descriptively on average, interaction with social work faculty at a greater frequency than did students of color.

The third and final product of this banded dissertation is a peer-reviewed national conference presentation. In a workshop format, using elements of Empowerment Theory and focusing on implicit curriculum as a methodology through which retention can be addressed, this presentation focused on identifying ways to increase retention rates of BSW students of color. After identifying factors that can interfere with retaining students of color, presentation participants engaged in a presenter-facilitated small-group activity, and a large-group discussion during which attendees identified elements of their BSW programs that currently address this issue, and selected ways in which they could modify current practices, through components of implicit curriculum, in order to increase retention of BSW students of color.

Keywords: Social work education, Intent to Persist, Retention, Students of Color, Ethnicity

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Audrey Wiggins Roberts. Even in your absence, yours was the voice that inspired and guided me through this process. Thank you for your unrelenting support and unabashed pride concerning my pursuit of higher education. I am now “a professor at the University.”

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend thanks to many people who so generously contributed to the completion of this dissertation in explicit and implicit ways. I am grateful to the faculty and students at my home institution, Saginaw Valley State University. Their support of, and participation in the research project that is at the core of this banded dissertation is very much appreciated and valued.

To the members of St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas DSW Cohort 2, all of my admiration, thanks and good wishes to you as you pursue your dreams. A special thank you to my summer roomies-Lisa Borneman, Shannon Cassidy-Cousineau, and Judy Zimbelman. The friendships we developed have sustained me in all ways possible throughout this program, and for that I am immeasurably grateful.

I would also like to acknowledge my parents Judy and Bill who instilled a sense of curiosity in me that has served as a guiding force in my pursuit of higher education. A deep thank you to my brother Russ whose encouragement through this process was more valuable than he knows. Remember...you're the smart one. And to Diane, Kathleen and Patrick – my family of choice – thank you for keeping me anchored through this process, and for making sure I have a life to return to postdoc.

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Examining Influencing Factors on BSW Students' Intent to Persist

The social work profession is facing a major challenge: attempting to diversify its professional body. Especially regarding race, the social work profession is significantly less diverse than the U.S. population (Bowie, Cherry & Wooding, 2005; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Respecting diversity is a core principle in social work education. Since 1971, as a way to address racial disparities within schools of social work, the CSWE has required each accredited program "...to demonstrate the special efforts it is making to enrich its program by providing racial and cultural diversity in its student body, faculty and staff" (CSWE, 1971, p. 10). In citing revisions made in the 2008 Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), Jani, Pierce, Ortiz, & Sowbel (2011) assert that the CSWE further integrated standards regarding nondiscrimination as a way, in part, address issues of retaining underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. However, concerns remain about social work education's ability to secure and enhance the number of students of color in their programs.

Even with these requirements in place, students of color remain underrepresented in social work education programs. According to the Council on Social Work Education (2013), 41.8% of full-time undergraduate students are from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, according to the CSWE, only 37.4% of the 30,000-plus BSW social work students actually graduate from accredited programs each year. While these statistics represent a slight increase over time in the enrollment of students of color in BSW programs, they continue to drop out at higher rates than their white counterparts (CSWE, 2013). Subsequently, one issue addressed in this banded dissertation will be attrition as a major obstacle to graduating ethnically diverse students from undergraduate programs.

Many studies have looked at factors influencing social work career choice (Bowie et al., 2005; Butler, 1990; Limb & Organista, 2003; Rubin & Johnson, 1984). However, the majority of these studies have focused on MSW students, rather than BSW students. These studies largely focus on what brings social work students into the field (e.g. preexisting altruistic values, personal interaction with a social worker), or what contributes to career choice post-graduation (e.g. increase income, advance career) (Bowie & Hancock, 2000). Several studies have investigated recruitment of minority social work students (Morris-Compton, 2007; Dillon, 2011; Enoch, 1988; Raber, Tebb & Berg-Weger, 1998). Among the studies reviewed, very few have directly examined the retention of BSW students and of those studies, none have specifically examined intent to persist as a factor related to the retention of students of color. Retention rates commonly measure the percentage of undergraduate students who re-enroll the next academic year (Marrow & Ackerman, 2012). The primary reason that retention rates, along with graduation rates are important is that retention rates are perceived as indicators of academic quality and student access (Arnold, 1999). However, “persistence, a student’s continuation behavior leading to a desired goal, helps describe processes related to student goal achievement” (Arnold, p. 1). Studies outside of social work programs have found that a focus on intent to persist to be of value in determining how their programs influence students’ behavior related to persistence (Bowman & Denson, 2014; Wheelless, Witt, Maresh, Bryand, & Schrod, 2011; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). While the extant literature has recruitment as one of its themes, little has been examined the additional tier of concern; which principle factors influence BSW students’ intention to persist, especially those students who could eventually diversify the field. Processes related to intent that must be explored if we are to understand why students of color are leaving social work programs at higher rates than their white counterparts.

Social work is a field of study that has (at its roots) a focus on racial justice and empowerment. Although there is a significant focus on this within social work education programs and within undergraduate classrooms (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Jani, 2011; Teasley, Archuleta & Miller, 2014) data demonstrate that we, as social work educators, are not closing the gap between white students and students of color in our social work programs. Since schools of social work serve as the sentinel of the profession, few elements are more crucial to the profession than the diversity of the students who enter and successfully complete a social work degree. If the social work profession is to adhere to its charge of promoting equity and diversity, it must cultivate and secure a more balanced composition of its student body. This author acknowledges that cultural systemic factors, institutional factors specific to higher education, and elements related to explicit curriculum directly influence students' intent to persist. However, the focus of this banded dissertation is limited to the principle elements of implicit curriculum as they impact intent to persist.

Conceptual Framework

Reasons for cultivating and securing a more balanced composition of a BSW student body through retention activities will be offered through the lens of empowerment theory. Empowerment theory emerged in its current form in the 1980's (Wilkinson, 1998). Since then several variations of the theory have been offered as a way to understand oppressed populations, and the process by which empowerment is achieved (Carr, 2002; Gutierrez, Parsons, Cox, 1998; Parson, 1991). For the purposes of this dissertation, the tenets of the theoretical framework that will be employed are:

individuals are assumed to understand their own needs better than anyone else, and therefore should have the power to define and act upon them; all people possess strengths on which they can build; empowerment is a lifelong endeavor; and personal knowledge and experience are valid and useful in coping effectively (Lord & Hutchison, 1993, p. 4).

Current elements of empowerment theory were influenced by several and varied factors. These include Paulo Freire's (1973) "critical consciousness," Unionism, the Black Power Movement, the War on Poverty, and the Feminist Movement. Freire asserts a theory in which the individual learns to cultivate her or his own growth through situations from daily life. At the core of empowerment is the narrative that the individual creates and permits themselves to reflect upon and analyze the world in which they live—not so much to adapt themselves to this world, but rather as part of an effort to reform it and make it conform to their demands is at the core of empowerment.

Not until the 1970's, and especially after the 1976 publication of *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Community* (1976) by Barbara Solomon, however, does the term

empowerment formally come into usage by social services providers and researchers. Early concepts of empowerment developed in the United States are anchored in a philosophy that gives priority to the points of view held by oppressed peoples, enabling them not only to express themselves, but also to gain power and overcome the domination to which they are subject (Wise, 2004).

Empowerment is, first and foremost, about power; changing power dynamics in favor of those who previously exercised little power over their own lives. Simon (1994) defines power as having two central aspects; “control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial, and the self), and control over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes)” (p. 11). If power means control, then empowerment is the gaining of control. Embedded within this definition is the assumption that empowerment can mean different things to different people and vary in form across settings and time (Rappaport et al., 1984; Zimmerman, 1990).

Common and major assumptions of the theory include:

- Individuals are assumed to understand their own needs better than anyone else and therefore should have the power both to define and act upon them
- All people possess strengths on which they can build
- People should be assisted to empower themselves
- People who share commonalities need each other to attain empowerment
- Cultivating resources, strategies and competencies to attain personal and collective goals is essential (Keiffer, 1984; Lord & Hutchison, 1993; Lee, 2001).

Considered individually and collectively, these assumptions serve to offer ways to “measure the construct in different contexts, to study empowering processes, and to distinguish empowerment

from other constructs such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and locus of control” (Zimmerman, 1990, p. 43). Empowering processes for individuals might include participation in community organizations. Empowering processes at the community level might include collective decision making and shared leadership. At both levels, the contextual theory of empowerment presents the transition from powerlessness to more control in life as a change in both human activity and the social structure. An empowerment approach requires focusing on helping client systems gain more control over their lives, making client systems more aware of and using their own personal resources, overcoming obstacles in meeting their needs and aspirations, having their voices heard in decision-making, and being able to challenge situations where they experience inequality and oppression (Wilkinson, 1998).

Social work is a field of study that has (at its roots) a focus on racial justice and empowerment. Although there is a significant focus on this within social work education programs and within undergraduate classrooms (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Jani, 2011; Teasley, et al., 2014) data demonstrate that we, as social work educators, are not closing the gap between white students and students of color in our social work programs. Since schools of social work serve as the sentinels of the profession, few elements are more crucial to the profession than the diversity of the students who enter and successfully complete a social work degree. If the social work profession is to adhere to its charge of promoting equity and diversity, it must cultivate and secure a more balanced composition of its student body.

Empowered learners are more motivated to perform classroom tasks, find the required tasks more meaningful, feel more competent in the classroom, and feel they have an impact on their learning process (Houser & Brainbridge-Frymeyer, 2009). One could conjecture that fewer students of color would be dropping out of BSW programs if they were empowered learners.

Perhaps it is the case that we as social work educators are not empowering our students in the classroom or in our programs overall. This writer's banded dissertation will explore ways in which social work programs are and are not providing opportunities for students to demonstrate that they are motivated and competent learners to the degree that they intend to persist in their social work education endeavors.

Summary of Banded Dissertation Products

Each of the three related components of this banded dissertation focuses on identifying factors that influence BSW students' intent to persist through the completion of their degree, with particular focus on students of color. The first product, entitled "BSW Students' Intent to Persist Through Conclusion of Degree: Influencing Factors" is a conceptual article that, through the lens of empowerment theory, presents a framework for understanding the varied and nuanced influencing factors contributing to BSW students' intent to persist based on a review of the professional literature. Additionally, the article explores ways in which social work education programs can provide opportunities for students to demonstrate that they are motivated and competent learners to the degree that they intend to persist in their social work education endeavors.

The second product of this banded dissertation is an empirical paper entitled "Examining Differences: Perceptions of Implicit Curriculum by Students of Color and White Students." This article presents the results of cross-sectional qualitative research study based on a 2017 survey of 247 BSW students at a mid-size Midwestern university in the United States. This study sought to expand the understanding of how BSW students from different racial/ethnic groupings differed in their views concerning the presence of certain domains of implicit curriculum as these related to their intent to persist through completion of their degree. Findings from this study

suggest no difference between students of color and their white counterparts in terms of their intent to persist. However, with regard to student/faculty interaction, Caucasian students reported descriptively on average, interaction with social work faculty at a greater frequency than did students of color.

The third and final component of this banded dissertation provides an overview of a peer-reviewed workshop presentation at the annual Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD) conference held in Atlanta, GA, March 14–18, 2018. Using elements of Empowerment Theory and focusing on implicit curriculum as a methodology through which retention can be addressed, the first part of the presentation focused on this author and workshop participants identifying ways to increase retention rates of BSW students of color. During the second part of the presentation this author engaged workshop participants in conversation and collaboration concerning ideas about empowering and retaining BSW students of color in their individual social work education programs.

Discussion

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015) 86% of licensed social workers are white. As the U.S. population becomes more diverse it is imperative that the social work profession examine how the mostly Caucasian make-up of the profession will impact our work with a more diverse client population. One component of this examination is to address the low percentage of BSW degrees awarded to students of color, as compared to Caucasian students (CSWE, 2016).

The research of this banded dissertation adds to the body of work in the area of how empowering students through implicit curriculum influences BSW students' intent to persist through the completion of their degree. Based on literature focusing on differences among student ethnic groups and intent to persist (Arnold, 1999; Bowie & Hancock, 2000; Bowman &

Denson, 2014; Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012), we should see distinctions in the data from this study. However, the results did not suggest that differences exist between ethnic groups, at least for students at the institution used in this study. Both groups of students (Caucasian students and students of color) in this BSW program reported an intent to persist through the completion of their degree at the same rate, and appeared to experience influencing factors (implicit curriculum) similarly in all areas but one. This area was regarding student/faculty interaction, where Caucasian students reported descriptively on average, interaction with social work faculty at a greater frequency than did students of color. However, at least on the surface, this level of interaction did not appear to alter the degree to which students planned to complete their BSW education. If, as Houser & Brainbridge-Frymeyer (2009) assert, empowered learners are more motivated to perform and feel more competent in the classroom, the results of this study suggest students at this institution feel empowered in ways that contribute to their desire to persist through the completion of their BSW degree.

While it is certainly justifiable to acknowledge the successful program elements that contribute to these similarities in the institution used for this study, perhaps examining underlying factors would reveal undiscovered differences between student ethnic groups. It is this writer's belief that latent relations among variables could be identified to develop possible conceptual frameworks that would lead to a more critical understanding of this topic.

Implications for Social Work Education

Students of color remain underrepresented in social work education programs. According to the Council on Social Work Education (2016), only 37.4% of the 19,596 BSW degrees awarded during the 2014-2015 academic year, were awarded to students from historically underrepresented groups (CSWE, 2016). Identifying ways to empower students of color will not

only bring social work's professional values and ethics into our BSW classrooms, it will potentially increase the graduation rates of students of color from BSW programs. Subsequently, addressing this issue will also influence the lack of practicing social workers of color in our increasingly diverse U.S. population.

As BSW programs continue to work toward integrating implicit curriculum as an essential feature of their curriculum, social work faculty serving as student advisors may want to consider approaching advising and mentoring duties in ways that are consistent with social work practice. Rather than employing the same advising model and practices for each student, it is critical that social work education programs empower students through advising and mentoring that makes use of the student's unique strengths while also considering their needs. It is conjectured that in doing so there will be an increase in interactions between students of color and social work faculty. Academic advising models such as proactive, inquiry based, and developmental advising (versus prescriptive advising) encourage faculty to become involved with the student from both academic and holistic perspectives (Walters, 2016). When working through a more democratic relationship between student and advisor, the student's distinctive life experiences can be used to cultivate cultural and social capital for the student.

If other BSW programs are to expect similar positive results (as compared to the results of the study reported on in Product 2 of this banded dissertation) with regard students' perception of implicit curriculum, and high levels of intent to persist, a fundamental element of these programs should be the empowerment of students. When students' strengths and interests are incorporated into implicit curriculum design and application, such as involvement in the field education assignment process, and student advising, social work students see themselves as valuable components of the program's culture. Ultimately it is through this lens of value that

students strengthen their professional identities and competencies and choose to persist through the completion of their degree.

Implications for Future Research

The study related to Product 2 examined factors related to students' intent to persist through completion of their degree. Additionally, the perception of student-faculty interactions as they related to support and mentoring, and perception of social work classroom inclusion and experience were explored. Students across racial/ethnic groups in the institution involved in the study reported positive experiences of implicit curriculum descriptively, and when using independent t-tests across statistical approaches. Additionally, there were no significant differences regarding students' intent to persist through completion of their BSW degree. The one area where a significant difference was found between student ethnic groups concerned the frequency with which students interacted with social work faculty. Social work students of color at this institution had fewer interactions with social work faculty than did their Caucasian counterparts. Because student-faculty interaction is one element of implicit curriculum that is known to influence persistence through completion of degree, it will be necessary to identify ways to address this discrepancy if social work education programs are to strengthen their ethnically diverse student population.

Future studies should include a larger and more diverse demographic base of BSW students, as the participant group in the empirical portion of this banded dissertation was limited. It would be constructive to include BSW students from other universities across the U.S. in order to expand the work of this research. A closer analysis of the latent factors among variables that may influence those student decisions as these views differ between racial and ethnic student groups should be explored as a way to provide a more critical understanding of the topic.

Additionally, focus groups could be used to enhance current findings as they can draw upon respondents' experiences, feelings, attitudes, reactions, and beliefs in ways that were not possible through the cross-sectional survey method used for this banded dissertation.

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Product 1

BSW Students' Intent to Persist Through Conclusion of Degree: Influencing Factors

Teresa L. Beadlescomb

St. Catherine University/the University of St. Thomas

UNAVAILABLE UNTIL JUNE 1, 2020

Product 2

Examining Differences Between Students of Color and Caucasian Students:
Perceptions of Implicit Curriculum as they Influence Intent to Persist

Teresa Beadlescomb

St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas

UNAVAILABLE UNTIL JUNE 1, 2020

Why Aren't Students of Color Staying in BSW Programs?

Teresa L. Beadlescomb

St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas

Abstract

Data suggests a slight increase over the last several years in the enrollment of students of color in BSW programs in the United States, however these students continue to drop out at higher rates than their white counterparts (CSWE, 2016). Using elements of Empowerment Theory and focusing on implicit curriculum as a methodology through which retention can be addressed, this presentation focused on identifying ways to increase retention rates of BSW students of color. After identifying factors that can interfere with retaining students of color, presentation participants engaged in a presenter-facilitated small-group activity, and a large-group discussion during which attendees identified elements of their BSW programs that currently address this issue, and selected ways in which they could modify current practices, through components of implicit curriculum, in order to increase retention of BSW students of color. This presentation was given at the annual Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD) conference which was held in Atlanta, GA, March 14 – 18, 2018. The presentation was in workshop format with approximately 60 individuals in attendance.

Keywords: students of color, BSW students, retention, empowerment

Product Three: Conference Presentation

Why Aren't Students of Color Staying in BSW Programs?

Introduction

Students of color remain underrepresented in social work education programs. According to the Council on Social Work Education (2016), only 37.4% of the 19,596 BSW degrees awarded during the 2014-2015 academic year, were awarded to students from historically underrepresented groups (CSWE, 2016). While data represent a slight increase over time in the enrollment of students of color in BSW programs, these students continue to drop out at higher rates than their white counterparts (ACT, 2016; CSWE, 2016). Since schools of social work serve as the sentinel of the profession, few elements are more crucial to the profession than the diversity of the students who enter and successfully complete a social work degree. If the social work profession is to adhere to its charge of promoting equity and diversity, it must cultivate and secure a more balanced composition of its student body.

Ways to cultivate and secure a more balanced composition of a BSW student body will be offered through the lens of empowerment theory. Empowerment is, first and foremost, about power; changing power dynamics in favor of those who previously exercised little power over their own lives (Lord & Hutchison, 1993; Rappaport, Swift & Hess, 1984; Zimmerman, 1990). Tenets of the framework employed during the presentation were: individuals are assumed to understand their own needs better than anyone else, and therefore should have the power to define and act upon them; all people possess strengths on which they can build; empowerment is a lifelong endeavor; and personal knowledge and experience are valid and useful in coping effectively (Lord & Hutchison, 1993).

Empowered learners are more motivated to perform classroom tasks, find the required tasks more meaningful, feel more competent in the classroom, and feel they have an impact on their learning process (Bowman & Denson, 2014; Houser & Brainbridge-Frymeyer, 2009). One could conjecture that fewer students of color would be dropping out of BSW programs if they were empowered learners. Perhaps it is the case that we as social work educators are not empowering our students enough in our classrooms or in our programs overall. If we are to understand the underrepresentation of students of color in BSW graduation rates, ways in which social work programs are, and are not providing opportunities for students to demonstrate that they are motivated and competent learners must be explored (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012).

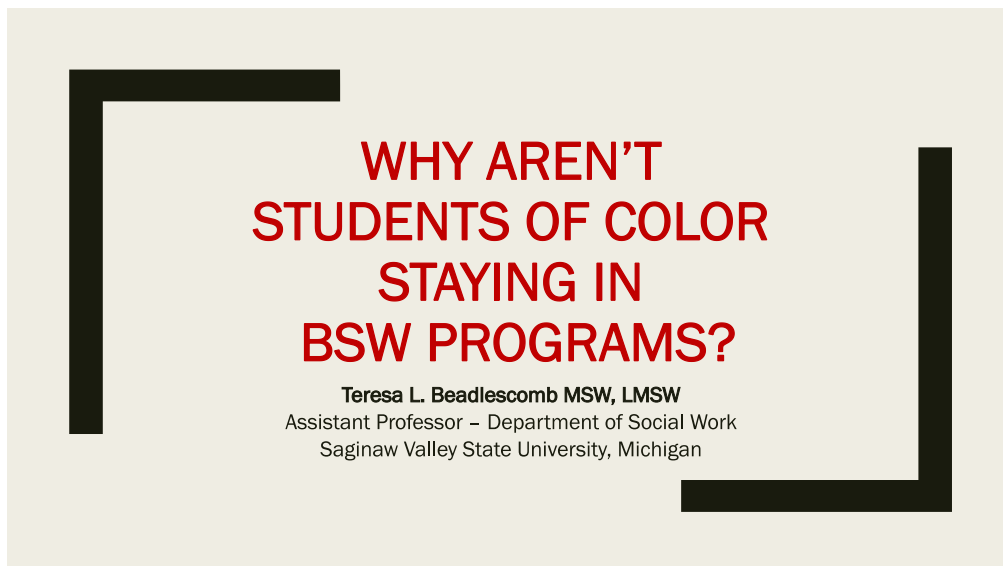
Respecting diversity is a core principle in social work education. Consequently, it is important that we close the retention gap between white students and students of color in our social work education programs. This presentation examined social work educators' experience in the role of empowering social work students, especially as it relates to working with students of color, through components of implicit curriculum. Through small-group activities and large-group discussion facilitated by this author, elements of existing BSW programs' culture which foster inclusion, engagement, and empowerment of students of color were explored. Additionally, participants identified ways to apply various elements of empowering BSW students of color to student recruitment, student mentoring/advising, and practicum experiences.

Presentation of Content

This presentation was given at the annual Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD) conference which was held in Atlanta, GA, March 14 – 18, 2018. The presentation was in workshop format, and was conducted on Thursday, March 15 from 11:00am – 12:15pm. This presentation was consistent with the 2018 BPD conference theme “The Grand

Challenges of Political Change” in that it focused on ways to navigate social work education policies and practices in ways that will address the sociopolitical of retention of BSW students of color. The presentation included three main categories: discussion concerning possible contributing factors to the issue, an overview of the elements of Empower Theory as they relate to student retention, and an examination of implicit curriculum in their programs as a methodology for empowering students; a small-group activity during which attendees identified ways to operationalize their ideas about empowering students through implicit curriculum; and a large-group discussion during which the presenter facilitated the sharing of ideas about empowering and retaining BSW students of color.

Slide 1



Slide 2

Agenda For Today

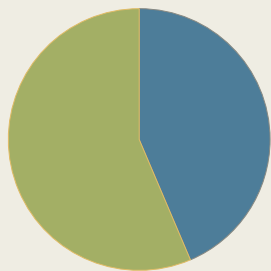
- Where we are now with regard to students of color in BSW programs
- Why is this topic important?
- What is empowerment and how does it effect students
- What can interfere with students being empowered?
- Empowerment through implicit curriculum
- Preliminary findings from my research
- Small group activity
- How SVSU tries to empower students

Teresa Beadlescomb – Saginaw Valley State University

Slide 3

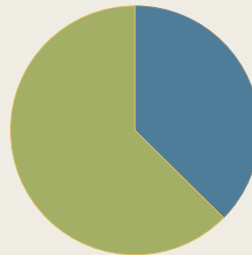
Where We Are Now

BSW Enrollment



■ Students of Color
■ Caucasian Students

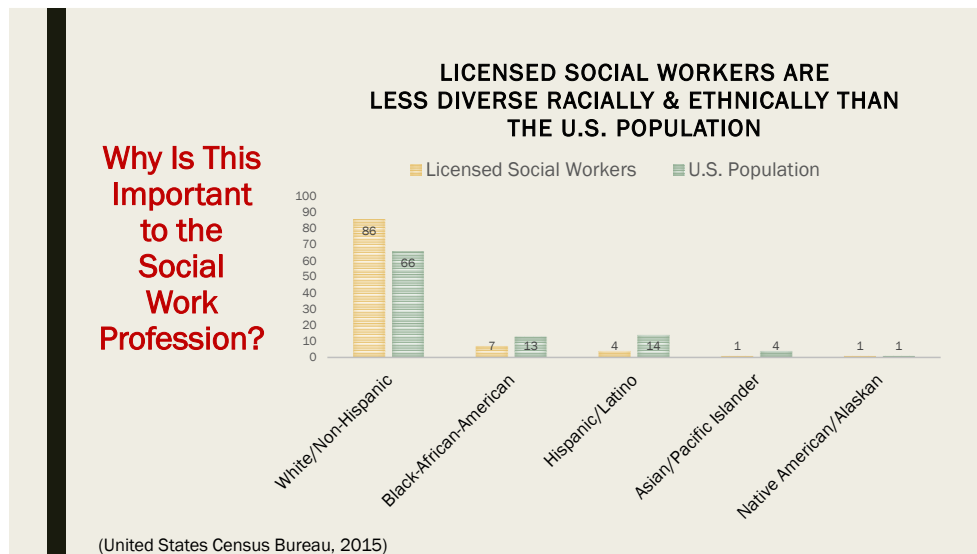
BSW Degrees Awarded



■ Students of Color
■ Caucasian Students

Council on Social Work Education, 2016

Slide 4



Slide 5

Empowering Students

- Empowerment influences students' sense of meaning and identity
- Empowered learners are more motivated to perform classroom tasks, find the required tasks more meaningful, feel more competent in the classroom, and feel they have an impact on their learning process (Houser & Brainbridge-Frymeyer, 2009).
- Elements of empowerment inform the extent to which social work students *successfully transition* to professional practice, and believe they have *the capacity to demonstrate confidence* in their social work practice (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard & Day, 2010; Peterson, Farmer, and Zippay, 2014).

Slide 6

What Can Interfere With Empowering BSW Students of Color In Our Classrooms...

- Theories, frameworks, social welfare policies
- Students being asked to serve as the spokesperson
- Focus on marginalization, oppression, etc., but not on the strengths
- People who look like me...

Teresa Beadlescomb – Saginaw Valley State University

Slide 7

Additional Possible Contributions to This Problem

- Cultural institutional factors (e.g. poor funding of public schools, racist practices in social services agencies)
- Higher Education institutional factors (e.g. lack of affirmative action policies, campus culture)
- Explicit curriculum within social work programs (e.g. course syllabi, assignments)
- *Implicit curriculum within social work programs (e.g. program cultural values, honoring multiple perspectives, hidden readings)*

Teresa Beadlescomb – Saginaw Valley State University

Slide 8

Implicit curriculum

- “The educational environment in which the explicit curriculum is presented” (EPAS, 2015 p.10)
- “The climate, culture, and values that make up a hidden or unseen learning environment that may complement or contradict the content of a program’s explicit curriculum” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, Rennert-Ariev, 2008).
- “The role of the implicit curriculum in social work education supports an educational environment that is *consistent with “the values of the profession and mission, goals, and contexts of the program”* (EPAS, 2015, p. 14).

Teresa Beadlescomb – Saginaw Valley State University

Slide 9

Do Elements of *Empowerment* Inform Your Program’s Implicit Curriculum?

Implicit Curriculum Factors

Cultural Institutional Factors

Explicit Curriculum Factors

Higher Educational Institutional Factors

Empowering
Students of Color

Slide 10

Discussion

- How have you approached empowering students of color in your program through implicit curriculum?
- What ideas did you come up with today?

Teresa Beadlescomb – Saginaw Valley State University

Slide 11

Preliminary Findings of My Research...

- Interactions between students of color and social work faculty outside of the class
- Correlation between “sense of belonging” and “faculty support” for students of color

Teresa Beadlescomb – Saginaw Valley State University

Slide 12

What Saginaw Valley State University is Doing to Empower Students

- Small class sizes
- Core social work classes taught by FT Social Work faculty
- Fulltime faculty serve as student advisors
- Social work major open house
- Field practicum placement structure



Slide 13

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Summary of Feedback Received from Participants

Between 60 – 65 individuals attended the presentation, however approximately five people left before the workshop concluded. Of the participants who responded to the questions concerning how many years of professional experience they had in social work education, approximately half had ten years or more experience in social work higher education. Fifty-six participants completed the feedback form provided by this writer (see Appendix A). The feedback form is two-sided, however even though participants were directed to turn the form over, not all participants completed the second side. Subsequently, the data presented below (see Table 1) focus on responses located on side one of the feedback document. Questions 1 – 3 pertain to the presenter (e.g., communication, organization, knowledge), and questions 4 – 6 are related to the workshop learning objectives.

Table 1

Feedback Received from Participants (N=56)

<u>Questions</u>	<u>Strongly Agree or Agree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Disagree or Strongly Disagree</u>
1. The instructor was a good communicator	55 (98%)	0 (0%)	1 (2 %)
2. The material was presented in an organized manner	55 (98%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)
3. The instructor was knowledgeable on the topic	54 (96%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
4. I was able to identify ways to apply various elements of empowering BSW students of color to student recruitment, student mentoring/advising, and	52 (93%)	3 (5%)	1 (2%)

practicum experiences			
5. I was able to identify elements of existing BSW programs' culture which foster inclusion, engagement, and empowerment of students of color	51 (91%)	4 (7%)	1 (2%)
6. I gained knowledge about factors contributing to students of color leaving BSW social work programs at higher rates than their white counterparts	49 (87%)	5 (9%)	2 (4%)
Mean Scores (<i>N</i> =56)	52.67 (94%)	2.17 (4%)	1.17 (2%)

Of the feedback received by participants that offered suggestions for improvement one general area emerged from the open-ended responses. Several workshop attendees suggested that more specific examples be given as to which elements of implicit curriculum are most closely associated with empowering students of color. Some participants suggested that this be done by fleshing out the findings of the professional literature in preparation for the conference presentation. Others suggested that this be done by allowing for more time in the workshop for attendees to report out and share further the results of the small-group activity that was a part of the presentation (see Appendix B for activity handout). These suggestions correspond to the data provided in Table 1 in that the lower scores related to knowledge participants gained about moving forward in their own BSW programs.

Of the feedback offered focusing on what the participants most appreciated about the presentation, two general areas surfaced from the open-ended question. The first related to the presenter's knowledge about the topic and her ability to navigate a sensitive topic with humility, directness, and even humor when appropriate. Several attendees commented on their

appreciation of the presenter's willingness to undertake research about, and discussions concerning elements that contribute to retaining students of color in their BSW programs. As one participant wrote, "...this opens up the conversation social workers are afraid to have amongst themselves." The second area that emerged from the open-ended question related to attendee's appreciation for the time to discuss this topic with peers. Participants valued the time set aside during the workshop for them to discuss and share ideas about which elements of their BSW programs are currently addressing this issue, and what they could be doing differently to increase retention of BSW students of color. Attendees commented on the usefulness of the activity handout (see Appendix B) both during the workshop, and as it could be applied to work they are doing in their individual institutions.

Critical Analysis of Conference Presentation

Using elements of Empowerment Theory and focusing on implicit curriculum as a methodology through which it could be addressed, this presentation attempted to identify ways to increase retention rates of BSW students of color. It was important to first provide a general overview of the enrollment vs. graduation rates of BSW students of color in the United States. Following a discussion about this data and its relevance to the social work profession's ethics, this presenter focused on developing a motive for the presentation by identifying various reasons that the exploration of this topic is important. The presenter guided a discussion that focused on these reasons as they appear inside the classroom, and as a critical element concerning our profession's racial and ethnic makeup. Finally, as a way to create a framework for the workshop small-group activity, the presenter reviewed the main elements of empowerment as it relates to working with college students, and the basic definition of implicit curriculum through which empowerment can be operationalized.

Approximately 15 minutes was allotted for the small-group activity during which participants were asked to identify examples of empowerment, using a handout distributed to attendees, that could be incorporated into components of implicit curriculum in their own BSW programs. Following this 15-minute period, participants were asked to move into larger groups and share their ideas about empowering students. Finally, the presenter led a large-group discussion focusing on ideas for moving forward in the areas of retaining students of color in our social work education programs.

Overall, the workshop was successful. This presenter was fortunate in that the length of the workshop was 1 ½ hours in length. This allowed for not only a presentation of the current literature and research on the topic, but also for application of this material to workshop participants' individual institutions. Even so, there didn't seem to be enough time to adequately share ideas about how to apply elements that can improve retention for a variety of racial and ethnic student groups. As a way to conserve time, this author considered eliminating the section of the presentation that focused on implicit curriculum, but retained it in the event there were attendees unfamiliar with the concepts. In fact, comments provided on the feedback forms supported this in that a number of people indicated that they wished we had spent more time discussing examples of implicit curriculum so that they could have moved through the small-group activity more effectively.

While preparing for the presentation, this author was most anxious about being a Caucasian person, believing she was an *expert* on a topic concerning people of color. Although the author is genuinely interested in, and is extremely concerned about the retention of BSW students of color, she did not want to be perceived as another white person who tells black and brown people the best way to approach issues related to them. To this end, the author very

deliberately employed components of cultural humility in her presentation development, and performance.

Subsequent to the completion of the presentation, and responses of the attendees this author is encouraged to present at future professional conferences. Additionally, the vibrant and constructive discussions that were a part of the presentation reinforces the need for more research in the area of the retention of BSW students of color.

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Appendix A

Workshop Evaluation Form

Your feedback is critical for the completion of this presenter's banded dissertation. We would appreciate if you could take a few minutes to share your opinions.

Please return this form to the instructor or organizer at the end of the workshop. Thank you.

Workshop title: Why Aren't Students of Color Staying in BSW Programs?

Date: March 22, 2018 **Instructor:** Teresa Beadlescomb, MLS, MSW, LMSW

	Strongly agree				Strongly disagree
1. The instructor was a good communicator	1	2	3	4	5
2. The material was presented in an organized manner	1	2	3	4	5
3. The instructor was knowledgeable on the topic	1	2	3	4	5
4. I was able to identify ways to apply various elements of empowering BSW students of color to student recruitment, student mentoring/advising, and practicum experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I was able to identify elements of existing BSW programs' culture which foster inclusion, engagement, and empowerment of students of color.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I gained knowledge about factors contributing to students of color leaving BSW social work programs at higher rates than their white counterparts.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Given the topic, was this workshop:	<input type="checkbox"/> a. Too short <input type="checkbox"/> b. Right length <input type="checkbox"/> c. Too long				
8. In your opinion, was this workshop:	<input type="checkbox"/> a. Introductory <input type="checkbox"/> b. Intermediate <input type="checkbox"/> c. Advanced				

9. *What did you most appreciate/enjoy/think was best about the workshop?*

10. *Any suggestions for improvement?*

Your Background:

10. Which of the following **best** describes your current position?

- ☐ a. Tenured Faculty ☐ d. Field Practice Program Director
- ☐ b. Tenure-Track ☐ e. Field Practice Program Staff
- ☐ c. Adjunct/Lecturer ☐ f. Student (are you: ☐ Undergrad ☐ Graduate ☐ Post-grad
- ☐ g. Other: _____

11. How many years of professional experience do you have in social work education?
_____ years

12. Is your BSW program:

- ☐ a. Predominately Students of Color
- ☐ b. Predominately White Students
- ☐ c. An equal balance of Students of Color and White students

Thank you!

Please return this form to the instructor or coordinator at the end of the workshop.

Appendix B

Conference Workshop Activity Handout

Merging Elements of Empowerment with Implicit Curriculum

As an Approach to Retaining BSW Students of Color

Elements of Implicit Curriculum	Elements of Empowerment
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruitment procedures 2. Admission policies and procedures 3. Student advising 4. Retention and termination policies 5. Attendance policies 6. Faculty/administration structure 7. Program's commitment to diversity 8. Resources available to students 9. Student participation in governance & curriculum development 10. Modeling of professionalism in teaching, communication & navigation of conflict and tension 11. Choice of assigned readings, hidden readings, case studies 12. Other _____ 13. Other _____ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individuals are assumed to understand their own needs better than anyone else 2. Students should have the power to define and act upon those their needs 3. Students possess strengths on which they can build 4. Personal knowledge and experience are valid and useful in coping and developing 5. Students have contributions to make to issues that affect their education/professional development within the context of their education communities 6. Students can make ongoing contributions to their education communities through relationships 7. For empowerment to occur students must be the ones to identify the problems and solutions 8. Other _____ 9. Other _____

Identify two aspects of implicit curriculum related to empowering BSW students that your program might address and identify possible interventions.

Element of I.C. _____	Element of I.C. _____
What could you change? (strategy must be measurable) _____	What could you change? (strategy must be measurable) _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
Who needs to be involved? _____	Who needs to be involved? _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
How would you implement this? _____	How would you implement this? _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
How would you measure this? _____	How would you measure this? _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
Where will this be made explicit in the context of your curriculum and/or syllabi?	Where will this be made explicit in the context of your curriculum and/or syllabi?
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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